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Release of initial findings from the Scottish Social Attitudes survey

Posted on 21st January 2014 by John Curtice

Tonight (Tuesday) sees the release of initial findings on attitudes towards independence from the latest Scottish Social Attitudes survey, which was conducted between June and October last year. Tomorrow (Wednesday) you will be able to both to mine the data for yourself using [our data explorer](#) while there will also be some briefings that report on our early analyses [available here](#). These results will also be discussed during [tomorrow's conference in Edinburgh](#).

Here is an initial summary of the some of the more interesting findings that the survey has uncovered:

1. This year we asked people in three different ways whether they were for or against independence. First we asked SSA's long-running question on [how Scotland should be governed](#). That elicited 29% support for independence, up six points on the equal record low recorded in 2012, but still three points below the level in 2011. Second, we posed a question we have also been asking in recent years about [which areas the Scottish Parliament should be responsible for](#). This time 31% said the Scottish Parliament should make all decisions for Scotland (implying independence), down four points on 2012. Finally, we asked people how they 'will' or 'think they are most likely' to vote in the referendum. This uncovered 30% support for Yes, 54% for No. In short, no matter how we addressed the issue we secured much the same answer!
2. There have only been small changes since last year in people's views of the possible consequences of independence and being in the Union – and not all in the same direction. For example, the proportion who think that Scotland's economy would be 'better' under independence has slipped from 34% to 30%. But equally the proportion that England gets the better deal economically out of the Union as it currently stands has increased from 28% to 32%.
3. The issue that appears above all to be influencing whether voters are inclined to vote Yes or No is what difference independence would make economically. As many as 71% of those who think that

Scotland's economy would be better under independence are inclined to vote Yes, while no less than 86% of those who think it would be worse are most likely to vote No. No less than 52% say they would support independence if they thought they would be £500 a year better off as a result, while 15% state they would back the idea if it meant they would be £500 a year worse off.

4. Indeed, the economy seems to have become more important than ever in determining whether voters back independence or not. Last year 50% of those who thought the economy would be a lot better under independence backed the idea (according to our long-running measure). Now that figure (using the same measure) has increased to 67%.

5. In contrast, many of the other issues that have often held central stage in the referendum campaign seem to be issues where voters' views make little difference to the way they are inclined to vote. For example, Yes and No voters hold very similar views on Europe. While 67% of Yes voters think that an independent Scotland should be a member of EU, so do 70% of No supporters. Not only do 63% of No voters think that Britain should either leave the European Union or at least reduce its powers, but so also do 57% of Yes supporters. Equally, although 39% of No supporters who would like an independent Scotland to continue to be able to use the pound are doubtful that that is what would happen, the same is also true of 33% of Yes voters who would like to keep the pound.

6. Much of the debate about the possibility of an independent Scotland being a more egalitarian and pro-welfare society appears to be missing its mark too. Only 16% think that the gap between rich and poor would be smaller as a result of independence. Although as many as 56% of No voters think that benefits for the unemployed are too high and discourage people from finding a job, so also do 46% of Yes voters.

7. The one debate about welfare that does seem to matter in informing voters' vote intentions is how they think benefits in Scotland should be funded. Overall, 61% think that the state old age pension paid to people living in Scotland should be funded out of UK-wide tax revenues, while just 34% believe that it should be funded out of revenues raised in Scotland alone. Amongst No voters, however, no less than 81% back UK-wide funding, while as many as 67% of Yes voters support Scotland only funding.

8. All in all the campaigning does not seem to have helped voters come to a clearer view about the decision they have to take in September. Even more people, 64%, say now that they are 'unsure' what would happen if Scotland became independent than did so in 2012 (58%). The report card for both sides seems to be marked, 'Could do better'.

This research was undertaken in collaboration with the [Applied Quantitative Methods Network](#) and was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council as part of its research initiative on [The Future of the UK and Scotland](#).

Topics: [Attitudes to independence](#), [Policy, parties and leaders](#), [Referendum voting intention](#)

About the author



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9 Comments

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Rev. Stuart Campbell • a year ago

"Only 16% think that the gap between rich and poor would be smaller as a result of independence."

John, Table 4 is horribly confusing, to the point where it even appears to have foxed you. With regard to the "gap between rich and poor" question, "More" and "Better" are (one would hope) not the same thing in that instance. The notes accompanying the initial release seem to suggest that your line quoted above is the wrong way round. They say that 25% think equality would improve with independence, with 16% being the opposing figure:

"the proportion who think that the gap between rich and poor in Scotland would be smaller, one of the key arguments put forward by the Yes campaign (including not least in the Scottish Government's White Paper on independence), has increased by six points, though at 25% it remains relatively low."

1 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

ScotCen Mod ➔ **Rev. Stuart Campbell** • a year ago

Yes there was a mix-up in the figures on this at one point before publication, and you might have picked up something where it was not corrected. But for clarification 16% think the gap between rich and poor would be smaller, which is classified as 'better'. 25% think it would be bigger which is categories as 'worse'. This is explained in one of the briefings to be posted today.

John Curtice

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

Thepnr • a year ago

You may or may not be asking the "right questions" but I suspect you may be asking the wrong people.

The likelihood is that the turnout in the referendum will be 80% or so, far more than generally vote in any election. Most of this increase in voters will undoubtedly be from the poorer districts of Scotland with traditionally the lowest turnouts.

I suspect these districts will be voting in numbers never before anticipated, and predominantly voting Yes.

Many there are never asked their opinion, many are not on the internet.. Most of these polls are flawed to some extent but this referendum might be a game changer in how polling should be conducted.

4 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

Bongobrian • a year ago

Ok, John Curtis. I will assist your stated impartiality on this site. you have linked to the BBC

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- [Do you agree that Scotland should be an independent country?](#)
- [On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely is it that you would vote in a referendum on Scottish independence?](#)
- [How would you vote in the referendum if Labour looked set to win the 2015 General Election?](#)
- [On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely is it that you would vote in an referendum on Scottish independence?](#)

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